

Testimony Before Judiciary Committee – 3.5.2021

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I am here to speak in favor of HB-6355 AN ACT CONCERNING RISK PROTECTION ORDERS OR WARRANTS.

It is not a trivial matter to label a person an "extreme risk" and remove their firearms. It is certainly not a step taken lightly by any of the actors involved in the process. But the step for the gun owner to get their firearms back needs a change. That gun owner should demonstrate, in a positive way, that the risk is no longer there. They were found to be the risk and they should be the ones to show that the risk is gone.

And how about non gun-owners found to be an extreme risk under this law? Should they be allowed to purchase firearms while under this order? If an existing gun owner has their firearms removed it makes no sense at all for non-gun owners under the order be allowed to purchase firearms.

Finally, this legislation removes an important barrier to its use. Under current law, the process the person at risk contacts and deals with the police. There are many people in Connecticut who have difficulty with this - people whose previous interactions with police have made them afraid to contact them. What about individuals who might have a warrant for failure to appear but are in abusive relationships with a gun owner and are fearful for their lives? Might they be afraid to contact police? The proposed change would allow those people in extreme risk to approach the court directly where the matter at hand would only be the risk and not any outstanding issues with law enforcement. A judge has more discretion than a police officer.

I have not been a victim of gun violence and I hope never to be one. But I attend most of the vigils conducted by the Hartford group Mothers United Against Violence and have witnessed the pain and horror of families who have lost loved ones to the violence. For years Connecticut has been at the forefront of humanely dealing with this scourge of gun violence and the changes proposed in HB6355 are a few more small steps of common sense that you need to take. Thank you.